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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the cross-cultural differences in American and Finnish elementary teachers' evaluations of their classroom teaching behaviors. The self-evaluation instrument developed for the study was administered to 167 American elementary teachers from Indiana and Texas and to 172 Finnish teachers (also elementary) from two different locations (Helsinki, Kajaani) in Finland. The results showed that American teachers rated themselves higher than their Finnish colleagues in every teaching behavior, thus reflecting higher self-esteem. The most visible feature of the American teachers was their dynamic teaching reflected in stimulating and flexible teaching behaviors where external sources and projects are integrated in the regular teacher centered classroom teaching. This characteristic may be explained in the context of the pedagogical traditions of the United States including the work of John Dewey and his emphasis on learning by doing. The Finnish teachers' evaluations showed an emphasis on academic learning time, "time on task" behavior. Finnish teachers wanted their students to master the academic goals set for them in the curriculum. This characteristic may be due to the pedagogic traditions of Finland and the demands of the national curriculum. In addition, the study found that the largest tendency to emphasize verbal communication in their teaching was seen with the Texas teachers. (Contains 18 references.) (JB)

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# Cross-cultural differencies in the self-evaluations of American and Finnish elementary teachers

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## Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the cross-cultural differencies in American and Finnish elementary teachers' evaluations of their classroom teaching behaviors. A group of teachers from Indiana and Texas representative of American teachers, and approximately the same number of Finnish teachers from two different locations (Helsinki, Kajaani) were chosen as the sample used for the study. These teachers evaluated their own teaching behavior with the help of a self-assessment instrument developed for this study. The behaviors selected to the instrument were based on American teacher effectiveness research (Dunkin & Biddle 1974, Waxman & Walberg 1991) and the existing teacher evaluation criteria in various school districts in United States. In particular, this study is an attempt to address the following questions:

- Q1: What differences can be identified in the self-evaluations of American and Finnish elementary teachers?
- Q2: What differences can be identified in the self-evaluations of the teachers at the national level (i.e., within different areas in the United States and Finland)?

## Theoretical Framework

The study is related to the studies in comparative education. Following Halls's typology it contributes to the subdivision of comparative studies called comparative pedagogy (Halls 1990). The different teacher education traditions are reflected in the actual teaching behavior of the teachers from different countries. For the theoretical

framework of this study the reform traditions in teacher education identified by Liston & Zeichner (Liston & Zeichner 1991) were selected. These reform traditions are: the Academic tradition, the Developmentalist tradition, the Social-reconstructionist tradition and the Social-efficiency tradition. In Finland teacher education is influenced by all of these traditions. The modern trend strongly emphasizes teachers' pedagogical thinking (Kansanen 1991). These Finnish trends in teacher education are discussed in more detail in (Tirri 1993). The recent American and Finnish research on teacher education and teacher's professional development is reviewed with the emphasis on the self-evaluation method as a versatile tool to help the teachers in their professional growth.

Self-evaluation as a method for helping teachers' professional growth

Various types of remedies have been developed for teachers in order to help them to reach the goal of professional growth. These methods include

- Supervision for teachers (Sava 1987),
- Inservice training for teachers (Harris 1989),
- Action research (Kemmis 1985),
- School consulting (Hämäläinen 1988),
- Professional development schools (Pugach and Pasch 1992),
- Teacher portfolios (Lichtenstein et al. 1992) and
- Self-evaluation.

If the teaching profession is viewed as a profession which requires continuous training and development, it is very important to develop tools for teacher self-

evaluation. The evaluation should be aimed at the current situation: what kind of skills and knowledge do I have today to work as a teacher?

There are several reasons to develop procedures for self-evaluation:

1. We can assume that the teachers find self-evaluation less threatening than the evaluation done by somebody else. In Canadian studies the teacher's attitudes towards self-evaluation have been positive (Ryan and Hickcox 1980).

2. Self-evaluation can help the teacher to clear her image of herself as a teacher. It can show the teacher some routine behaviors, and encourage seeking new challenges in the teaching profession. When the quality of teaching improves, the satisfaction in the profession may increase at the same time.

3. By evaluating his own teaching the teacher can be an example to his students in the continuous desire to learn new things and to develop in the profession.

4. Teachers' self-evaluation data is a viable starting point for both indirect and direct supervision. In indirect supervision the data from the teacher's self-evaluation can be used as a help in discussion. Self-evaluation shows the teacher the areas where he needs supervision. In direct supervision the self-evaluation data can guide the direction to areas for classroom observation. It might be easier for teacher to let somebody observe his teaching when he has been allowed to decide in what kind of things he needs help.

5. Teachers' self-evaluation can be implemented in teachers' inservice training. In school-based inservice training it renders the need for inservice training of the teachers more practical.

Self-evaluation can be viewed as a form of evaluation that suits an autonomous, reflective teacher in helping him to continuous growth and development in the teaching profession. It is easy to implement because it doesn't require large personnel or financial resources. Self-evaluation can be combined with supervision or inservice training. Implemented by itself it would also still serve the teacher in many ways by providing constant feedback from his own teaching.

## Methods

### The instrument

A common self-evaluation instrument was administered to 167 American elementary teachers from Indiana and Texas and to 172 Finnish teachers (also elementary) from two different locations in Finland. The American teachers were selected using the expert opinion of the representativeness of the school districts chosen. The superintendents of the chosen districts and the principles of the schools assisted in the administration of the survey. The Indiana teachers represent Mid-Western teachers and the Texan teachers are representative of central Texan teachers. In the case of Finnish teachers most of the questionnaires were distributed with the help of a research assistant who contacted the principles of the schools. The Finnish teachers consist of a sample of teachers both from the southern and a northern parts of Finland.

The self-evaluation instrument consisted of 100 behavior statements from the criteria list of DeTEK System (Harris and Hill 1982). The behaviors are grouped into six performance areas: Businesslike, Friendly, Verbally Interactive, Stimulating, Individually Oriented and Multi-Media Integrative. These criteria were originally chosen based on the results of teacher effectiveness research, current research theory and professional wisdom. The teachers evaluated themselves against these behavior descriptions using a scale from 1 to 6. They were encouraged to use the whole scale in their ratings.

Analysis methods

Initially the ratings of the teachers were analyzed statistically with the help of factor analysis reported in (Tirri 1993). These results were used as a basis for the discriminant analysis for the complete data set in order to identify discriminating factors from the primary factor structure identified. Instead of just investigating discrimination between American and Finnish teachers, the analysis was carried further by attempting to discover also for the geographical dimension (i.e., the effect of the area within a country). Thus for the discriminant analysis the data was divided into four mutually exclusive groups: Indiana teachers, Texan teachers, Finnish teachers in general setting and Finnish teachers evaluating themselves in a subject specific context (religious education). Since we are here interested in cross-cultural aspects of this study, the fourth subject specific group is ignored. The quality of the discriminating functions discovered was checked using the standard indicators such as Wilks's lambda and $\eta$ squared (Klecka 1981).

## Results

The results clearly show that the rating behavior of American and Finnish teachers differed from each other thus giving a positive answer to our question Q1. Due to space restrictions the numerical details of the analysis are omitted here and can be found in (Tirri 1993, 148-151). However, it should be pointed out that the relevant indicators such as Wilks's lambda verify the identified functions as good discriminators for the groups involved (after the third function Wilks's lambda value is .909). in addition the functions discovered were susceptible to a clear semantic interpretation. The discussion on the observations below is based on the both the results from the discriminant analysis as well as elementary statistical indicators such as group means.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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The American teachers rated themselves higher than their Finnish colleagues in every teaching behavior (see Figure 1), thus reflecting a higher self-esteem. This sociological phenomenon is related to the cultural difference in the emphasis on self-esteem that tends to be very high for American teachers (Bennet 1990, 51-52). The discriminant analysis revealed interesting differencies between American and Finnish teachers. In their own evaluation the most visible feature of both Texan and Indiana teachers is their dynamic teaching. Dynamic teaching is reflected in stimulating and

flexible teaching behavior where external sources and projects are integrated in the regular teacher centered classroom teaching. A dynamic teacher acknowledges students' personal affairs and interests, and provokes students' thinking processes in many different ways. The assessed dynamic teaching behavior of American teachers is easily understood against the background of the ideas of the best known American educator, John Dewey (Dewey 1957). He is known of his pragmatism and experimentalism which had a great impact to his ideas of schooling. His concept of "learning by doing" in school, a place he sees as an active, dynamic society itself, is influencing American teaching even today.

The most evident tendency in the Finnish teachers' evaluations was their emphasis on academic learning time, "time-on-task" behavior. A possible explanation for this discriminator is the academic reform tradition that has affected the Finnish teacher education. In academic tradition the content knowledge of academic subject is stressed, and the time spent on academic learning has shown to produce most learning in students. It seems that, at least in their intentions, the Finnish teachers want their students to master the academic goals that have been set for them in the curriculum, adopting the academic orientation of their own education. The tendency of Finnish teachers to spend most time on academic learning is explained also by the national curriculum in Finland. The curriculum sets universal goals that should be met by every teacher, and most of these goals are academically oriented. In United States education is considered to be the responsibility of the state and the curriculum contents differ in each of the 50 states. The same difference can also be seen in the teacher education programs in these two countries. Although differing from each other in their emphasis,

the 10 teacher education departments in Finland have a lot in common with the national curriculum. On the other hand, in United States the institutions, about 1300 in number, don't have any national curriculum but differ from each other in their standards and their methods.

Interestingly the data at hand also indicates an affirmative answer to our question Q2. In their evaluations the largest tendency to emphasize verbal communication in their teaching is seen with the Texan teachers. Somewhat surprisingly the Indiana teachers rank the last in this respect of all the groups of teachers. This difference between the American teachers from different states can be explained by the cultural differences between the American South and Midwest. The teachers in Texas have a large portion of students coming from Mexican-American families that speak Spanish as their native language. Those students have difficulties with the spoken English and even more difficulties with written English. The Indiana teachers teach much more homogenous group of students with less minority students in their classrooms. This cultural difference explains the tendency for the southern teachers to concentrate on the verbal communication skills that reach also the students from high context cultures. In Indiana the majority of the students come from low context cultures and the written word is reasonably effective way to reach the children who don't have difficulties with the English language (Bennett 1990).

## Importance of the Study

This study revealed many differencies between the teachers' evaluations from different cultures. The American and Finnish teachers clearly reflected the existing teaching tradition in their own country in their self-evaluations. Similarly the evaluations of teachers from different states can be seen to differ from each other as shown with Indiana and Texan teachers in this study.

The reliability of the teachers' self-reports can always be questioned. In self-assessment we trust the teachers as professionals to be the best authorities to judge their teaching behaviors. We acknowledge that sometimes the intentions and behaviors can be quite different, e.g., the self-reports of the American teachers seem to be in conflict with Goodlad's observational research which found largely teacher-centered classrooms in the United States (Goodlad 1984). This study reveals that the intensions of American and Finnish teachers differ from each other which is also reflected in their self-reports. Cross-culturality can be seen as a discriminating factor in the self-evaluations of the teaching behavior as shown by the results. In adoption of instruments and methods from different countries and contexts such cross-cultural aspects should always be investigated first.

Cultures can enrich each other and the communication between different cultures should be encouraged. Evidently the American teaching tradition can teach the Finnish teacher educators and give them new dynamic ideas. On the other hand, American

teacher educators might explore the academic strengths of Finnish teacher education and use them in the attempt to reform their teacher education.

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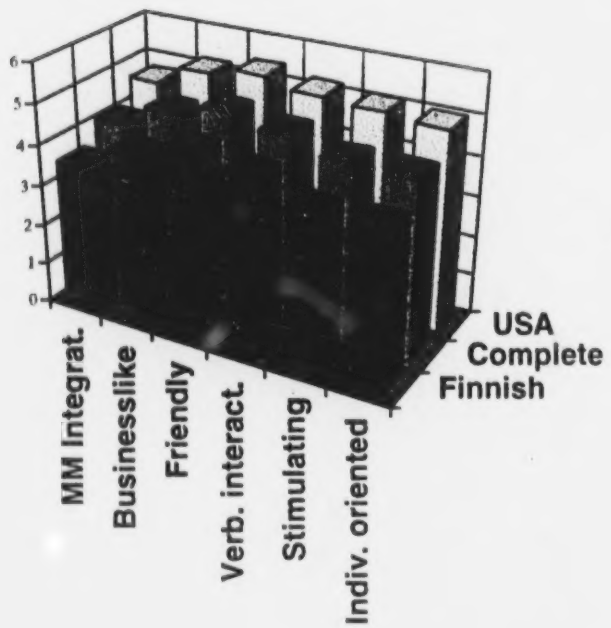


Figure 1. Means of the Harris components with respect to the different groups.